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Railway Transportation in Germany

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THE traffic condition of a country depends upon its economic needs with reference to the transportation facilities and their ability to cater to these needs. In Germany, as hardly need be emphasized, economic life is still completely under the spell of war. This is true also of all of the other countries of Europe, victorious or neutral, but for Germany and the other vanquished countries the continuance of the state of war is a grim reality. In fact, hostilities are still going on, although not with the ordinary means of warfare. In the west our erstwhile enemies are occupying German territory, maintaining large armed forces at the expense of Germany and exercising authority also in economic matters. In the east the German people are engaged in hostilities, as it were, both economic and otherwise, with the Poles openly supported by the French. Not the least serious, however, is the interference of the enemies with the most important of our economic goods, coal. Without coal railway transportation is impossible and without railway transportation the distribution of coal must cease. This reciprocal causal relationship is necessarily followed by a general retardation of the healing process. In peace times, coal represented some 40 per cent of all the freights carried. Its three principal sources were the Ruhr territory, Upper Silesia and the Saar Basin. The number of coal cars employed in these regions heretofore formed a barometer of the condition of German economic life.

In the numbers thus represented were reflected the ups and downs of the market, the weal and woe of industry and the efficiency of railroad service. Before the war there were employed each working day for the shipment of coal:

(1) In the Ruhr district (in round numbers) 35,000 cars of 10 tons each.

(2) In Upper Silesia, 13,000 cars of 10 tons each.

(3) In the Saar Basin, 3,000 to 4,000 cars of 10 tons each.

The figures, at the present time, are considerably lower. The daily employment of freight cars in the Ruhr territory is from 18,000 to 20,000 in number; in Upper Silesia, only from 7,000 to 8,000. The Saar district, so far as supplying German needs is concerned, has been made insignificant by the terms of the peacetreaty. Neither, for that matter, is the coal from Upper Silesia and the Ruhr, wholly German now. The Ruhr delivers to France and Belgium each month 2,000,000 tons employing approximately 8,000 freight cars each working day, and of this traffic, one-half moves in German rolling-stock. The Upper Silesian coal is at the disposal of the entente commission at Oppeln. The only coal remaining for Germany is that which is left over after supplying Poland, Italy and Czecho-Slovakia. From this follows a complete transformation of traffic in this most important freight. Formerly south Germany received a large part of its fuel from the Saar district; now the Ruhr must supply it with part of its coal, which moves

all the way by rail. This means a considerably greater burden upon the tracks and stations between the Ruhr and south Germany which have not been primarily designed for this traffic. To add to the difficulty of the situation, the supply of English coal to the entire seaboard region was cut off. Hamburg, for instance, received from England by sea over 5,000,000 tons of coal, which represented nearly one-half of its whole needs. East Prussia was also supplied with English coal far into the interior. This came to an end. Moreover, through the cession of the Polish corridor provided for in the peace treaty, east Prussia is reduced to a colony cut off from the Motherland by a foreign, and one might say hostile, region. It is through this region that all the coal going to east Prussia from the Ruhr and Upper Silesia must be carried. It is true that the peace treaty provides for an untrammelled transit of goods, but those aware of the usual practice of the Poles in counteracting these stipulations can imagine to what extent the traffic to east Prussia is suffering. Let one example suffice: According to the car-tracing of German roads, the Poles at the time of their occupation of the former German provinces took possession of approximately 30,000 freight cars. Meanwhile, moreover, they "forgot" to return approximately 34,000 of the coal cars imported into Poland freighted by them or only passing through their country. The German people today have little power to protect themselves against such a party to a contract. That an appeal to the entente commission at Oppeln promises scant results, however, needs no stretch of imagination.

The remainder of German traffic is at the lowest ebb. The commodities, notably foodstuffs and raw materials,

which were under government control during the war, are gradually going back into the free channels of commerce. This means, like every transition, a business venture at the start and a congestion of traffic. The point may be illustrated by the release of potatoes from wartime control. No one can tell where those potatoes suddenly set free are to go and no one is at all sure if trade will take care of their movement in a way most profitable to the railroads.

If no cheerful report can be made upon the economic condition of Germany, it is none the less so with the railway rolling-stock. The great strain which war put upon the railway rolling-stock, the construction of tracks, and in no less degree upon the railway personnel, is naturally much in evidence today. The war demanded a grinding economy in everything. All lay-off, repairing, replacement and reservation had to be dispensed with. This is bound to have its consequences.

Let us consider the locomotives. Before the war, we owned approximately 23,000 locomotives; the repair shops claimed nearly 19 per cent, so that we could count upon approximately 19,000 efficient locomotives. Five thousand of the best of these have to be surrendered to the Allies by the terms of the peace treaty. It may be mentioned in passing that this represents twice the number of the locomotives which Germany captured from the enemies during the war, not to mention the better quality of those surrendered. Newspaper reports state that a large number of these locomotives are tied up at French and Belgium stations, the roadway and structures in these countries being far too weak for such rolling-stock. More disastrous than this surrender of a large number of efficient locomotives is the increase of the stock

of the repair shops. This amounts at present to nearly 46 per cent of the engines available. It follows, therefore, that only about 13,000 locomotives are serving economically today, and this service itself has been greatly on the decrease. The introduction of the eight-hour working day, the decrease in the efficiency of the personnel resulting from underfeeding, the inferior quality of coal containing frequently 30 per cent slate over against a percentage of eight to ten in prewar times, the substitute material used in the building of rolling-stock, the ever-present shortage of oiling and packing material, are so many factors in reducing the service of each locomotive to a minimum.

The same is the case with freight cars. While before the war we could count a stock of approximately 800,000 freight cars, today we have scarcely one-half of the number. Approximately 170,000 cars have been surrendered to the Allies and to the Saar territory in accordance with the provisions of the peace treaty—all perfect and select cars. Approximately 110,000 were lost during the war; 60,000 are held by the Poles, and 100,000 are in foreign countries. When they will be returned, no one knows. Then there is a tremendous increase in the number of cars in repair shops. Add to this, a great reduction of car circulation and of kilometer movement.

Not otherwise is the picture presented by passenger traffic. Here also the number of passenger cars has been considerably curtailed through surrender to the former enemies. A large number of passenger cars were lost in Russia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Serbia and Turkey. The passenger tariffs had to be raised so that today traveling fourth-class costs more than the first-class before the war.

<i>Class</i>	<i>Cost before the War</i>	<i>Present Cost</i>
First	7.8 Pf.	54 Pf.
Second	4.7 “	24 “
Third	3.1 “	14.8 “
Fourth	2.0 “	8.1 “

It goes without saying that the effect of this raise of fares makes itself felt not only in the reduction of pleasure trips but it also influences our whole economic life. If the advance of the passenger tariffs has been necessitated by the financial needs of the commonwealth, the fact impresses us even more strongly with regard to the freight tariffs. For similar reasons, freight rates have been raised to nearly six times the prewar rates, and on account of the provisions of the Versailles Treaty the rates cannot be fixed in an economical manner. According to the treaty, the German internal tariff rates must be applied to foreign goods for import, export and transit. Any member of the Allies may demand that the international tariffs be quoted on these principles. The German seaports could no longer be protected by means of export tariffs because any such aid would also tend to favor every foreign port. Such provisions render the adoption of a national railroad tariff policy and the fostering of national economic life utterly impossible.

Even before the war the railroads found it beyond their power to serve the traffic single-handedly. They therefore had to call for the assistance of inland shipping as an auxiliary through the agency of the Department of Shipping specially created for this purpose. Today, as much as ever since the termination of war, shipping has to help where the railroads prove inadequate. In order to bring about a harmonious coöperation of railroads and shipping, the two agencies of transportation are now subordinated to the new “National Ministry of

Transportation." But shipping, too, has to suffer a severe blow. Out of its stock, a considerable tonnage must be turned over to the former enemies for reparation and also for the building up of newly-formed seaboard states. If, however, in spite of all this, the German railroads could grapple with the traffic in the summer of 1920, it was almost exclusively due to the fact that the economic needs of the country suffered eclipse owing to the collapse of industry and the reduced production and consumption in agriculture. Internal politics, the earning of daily bread and anxiety over the disruption

of the German nation have been occupying the people so much that these, coupled with all sorts of other restrictions, keep them from settling to work with vigor and energy. It is to be hoped that the German people still have sufficient morale to regain gradually their innate strength and that the restoration of the country will bring with it a normal railway condition. The consolidation of all state lines into a unified national railway system, which has been accomplished in the meanwhile, will doubtless contribute its share in raising the efficiency of the railroads.